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Senior Executive Service Executive Core Qualifications

The law requires that the *executive qualifications* of each new career appointee to the Senior Executive Service (SES) be certified by an independent Qualifications Review Board based on criteria established by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). The Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) describe the leadership skills needed to succeed in the SES; they also reinforce the concept of an "SES corporate culture." This concept holds that the Government needs executives who can provide strategic leadership and whose commitment to public policy and administration transcends their commitment to a specific agency mission or an individual profession. Executives with a "corporate" view of Government share values that are grounded in the fundamental Government ideals of the Constitution: they embrace the dynamics of American Democracy, an approach to governance that provides a continuing vehicle for change within the Federal Government.

OPM has identified five fundamental executive qualifications: (1) Leading Change, (2) Leading People, (3) Results Driven, (4) Business Acumen and (5) Building Coalitions/Communication. The ECQs were designed to assess *executive* experience and potential--not technical expertise. They measure whether an individual has the broad *executive* skills needed to succeed in a variety of SES positions--not whether they are the most superior candidates for a particular position. (This later determination is made by the employing agency.)

Successful performance in the SES requires competence in each ECQ. The ECQs are interdependent; successful executives bring all five to bear when providing service to the Nation. The basic definition for each ECQ is supplemented by Key Characteristics, which reflect possession of the executive qualification, and those Leadership Competencies which are particularly important to it. Candidates do not need to have experience in each Key Characteristic to demonstrate possession of the ECQ. Rather, the candidate's overall record (professional and volunteer experience, education and training, awards, accomplishments, and potential) should indicate that he/she has the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to succeed in the SES.

Based on extensive research of government and private sector executives, the Leadership Competencies are the personal and professional attributes that underpin the ECQs. By demonstrating possession of an ECQ, a candidate also demonstrates possession of its underlying competencies. Candidates need not address these competencies in their qualifications' write-ups. However, experience and training that strengthen these competencies will enhance a candidate's overall qualifications for the SES.

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ECQ 1 - LEADING CHANGE

This executive core qualification encompasses the ability to develop and implement an organizational vision, which integrates key national and program goals, priorities, values, and other factors. Inherent to it is the ability to balance change and continuity--to continually strive to improve customer service and program performance within the basic Government framework, to create a work environment that encourages creative thinking, and to maintain focus, intensity and persistence, even under adversity.

Key Characteristics:

(a)	Exercising leadership and motivating managers to incorporate vision, strategic planning, and elements of quality management into the full range of the organization's activities; encouraging creative thinking and innovation; influencing others toward a spirit of service; designing and implementing new or cutting edge programs/processes.
(b)	Identifying and integrating key issues affecting the organization, including political, economic, social, technological, and administrative factors.
(c)	Understanding the roles and relationships of the components of the national policy making and implementation process, including the President, political appointees, Congress, the judiciary, state and local governments, and interest groups; and formulating effective strategies to balance those interests consistent with the business of the organization.
(d)	Being open to change and new information; tolerating ambiguity; adapting behavior and work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles; adjusting rapidly to new situations warranting attention and resolution.
(e)	Displaying a high level of initiative, effort, and commitment to public service; being proactive and achievement-oriented; being self-motivated; pursuing self-development; seeking feedback from others and opportunities to master new knowledge.
(f)	Dealing effectively with pressure; maintaining focus and intensity and remaining persistent, even under adversity; recovering quickly from setbacks.

Leadership Competencies

- Continual Learning
- External Awareness
- Flexibility
- Service Motivation
- Strategic Thinking
- Vision

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ECQ 2 - LEADING PEOPLE

This executive core qualification involves the ability to design and implement strategies, which maximize employee potential and foster high ethical standards in meeting the organization's vision, mission, and goals.

Key Characteristics:

(a)	Providing leadership in setting the workforce's expected performance levels commensurate with the organization's strategic objectives; inspiring, motivating, and guiding others toward goal accomplishment; empowering people by sharing power and authority.
(b)	Promoting quality through effective use of the organization's performance management system (e.g., establishing performance standards, appraising staff accomplishments using the developed standards, and taking action to reward, counsel, or remove employees, as appropriate).
(c)	Valuing cultural diversity and other differences; fostering an environment where people who are culturally diverse can work together cooperatively and effectively in achieving organizational goals.
(d)	Assessing employees' unique developmental needs and providing developmental opportunities which maximize employees' capabilities and contribute to the achievement of organizational goals; developing leadership in others through coaching and mentoring.
(e)	Fostering commitment, team spirit, pride, trust, and group identity; taking steps to prevent situations that could result in unpleasant confrontations.
(f)	Resolving conflicts in a positive and constructive manner; this includes promoting labor/management partnerships and dealing effectively with employee relations matters, attending to morale and organizational climate issues, handling administrative, labor management, and EEO issues, and taking disciplinary actions when other means have not been successful.

Leadership Competencies:

- Conflict Management
- Cultural Awareness
- Integrity/Honesty
- Team Building

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ECQ 3 - RESULTS DRIVEN

This executive core qualification stresses accountability and continuous improvement. It includes the ability to make timely and effective decisions and produce results through strategic planning and the implementation and evaluation of programs and policies.

Key Characteristics:

(a)	Understanding and appropriately applying procedures, requirements, regulations, and policies related to specialized expertise; understanding linkages between administrative competencies and mission needs; keeping current on issues, practices, and procedures in technical areas.
(b)	Stressing results by formulating strategic program plans which assess policy/program feasibility and include realistic short- and long-term goals and objectives.
(c)	Exercising good judgment in structuring and organizing work and setting priorities; balancing the interests of clients and readily readjusting priorities to respond to customer demands.
(d)	Anticipating and identifying, diagnosing, and consulting on potential or actual problem areas relating to program implementation and goal achievement; selecting from alternative courses of corrective action, and taking action from developed contingency plans.
(e)	Setting program standards; holding self and others accountable for achieving these standards; acting decisively to modify them to promote customer service and/or the quality of programs and policies.
(f)	Identifying opportunities to develop and market new products and services within or outside of the organization; taking risks to pursue a recognized benefit or advantage.

Leadership Competencies

- Accountability
- Customer Service
- Decisiveness
- Entrepreneurship
- Problem Solving
- Technical Credibility

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ECQ 4 - BUSINESS ACUMEN

This executive core qualification involves the ability to acquire and administer human, financial, material, and information resources in a manner, which instills public trust and accomplishes the organization's mission and to use new technology to enhance decision-making.

Key Characteristics:

(a)	Assessing current and future staffing needs based on organizational goals and budget realities. Applying merit principles to develop, select, and manage a diverse workforce.
(b)	Overseeing the allocation of financial resources; identifying cost-effective approaches; establishing and assuring the use of internal controls for financial systems.
(c)	Managing the budgetary process, including preparing and justifying a budget and operating the budget under organizational and Congressional procedures; understanding the marketing expertise necessary to ensure appropriate funding levels.
(d)	Overseeing procurement and contracting procedures and processes.
(e)	Integrating and coordinating logistical operations
(f)	Ensuring the efficient and cost-effective development and utilization of management information systems and other technological resources that meet the organization's needs; understanding the impact of technological changes on the organization.

Leadership Competencies:

- Financial Management
- Human Resources Management
- Technology Management

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ECQ 5 - BUILDING COALITIONS/COMMUNICATION

This executive core qualification involves the ability to explain, advocate and express facts and ideas in a convincing manner, and negotiate with individuals and groups internally and externally. It also involves the ability to develop an expansive professional network with other organizations, and to identify the internal and external politics that impact the work of the organization.

Key Characteristics:

a)	Representing and speaking for the organizational unit and its work (e.g., presenting, explaining, selling, defining, and negotiating) to those within and outside the office (e.g., agency heads and other Government executives; corporate executives; Office of Management and Budget officials; Congressional members and staff; the media; clientele and professional groups); making clear and convincing oral presentations to individuals and groups; listening effectively and clarifying information; facilitating an open exchange of ideas.
(b)	Establishing and maintaining working relationships with internal organizational units (e.g., other program areas and staff support functions); approaching each problem situation with a clear perception of organizational and political reality; using contacts to build and strengthen internal support bases; getting understanding and support from higher level management.
(c)	Developing and enhancing alliances with external groups (e.g., other agencies or firms, state and local governments, Congress, and clientele groups); engaging in cross-functional activities; finding common ground with a widening range of stakeholders.
(d)	Working in groups and teams; conducting briefings and other meetings; gaining cooperation from others to obtain information and accomplish goals; facilitating "win-win" situations.
(e)	Considering and responding appropriately to the needs, feelings, and capabilities of different people in different situations; is tactful and treats others with respect.
(f)	Seeing that reports, memoranda, and other documents reflect the position and work of the organization in a clear, convincing, and organized manner.

Leadership Competencies:

- Influencing/Negotiating
- Interpersonal Skills
- Oral Communication
- Partnering
- Political Savvy
- Written Communication

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LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY DEFINITIONS

ECQ 1 - LEADING CHANGE

Continual Learning - Grasps the essence of new information; masters new technical and business knowledge; recognizes own strengths and weaknesses; pursues self-development; seeks feedback from others and opportunities to master new knowledge.

External Awareness - Identifies and keeps up to date on key national and international policies and economic, political, and social trends that affect the organization. Understands near-term and long-range plans and determines how best to be positioned to achieve a competitive business advantage in a global economy.

Flexibility - Is open to change and new information; adapts behavior and work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles. Adjusts rapidly to new situations warranting attention and resolution.

Service Motivation - Creates and sustains an organizational culture, which encourages others to provide the quality of service essential to high performance. Enables others to acquire the tools and support they need to perform well. Shows a commitment to public service. Influences others toward a spirit of service and meaningful contributions to mission accomplishment.

Strategic Thinking - Formulates effective strategies consistent with the business and competitive strategy of the organization in a global economy. Examines policy issues and strategic planning with a long-term perspective. Determines objectives and sets priorities; anticipates potential threats or opportunities.

Vision – Take a long-term view and acts a catalyst for organizational change; builds a shared vision with others. Influences others to translate vision into action.

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LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY DEFINITIONS

ECQ 2 - LEADING PEOPLE

Conflict Management - Identifies and takes steps to prevent potential situations that could result in unpleasant confrontations. Manages and resolves conflicts and disagreements in a positive and constructive manner to minimize negative impact.

Cultural Awareness - Initiates and manages cultural change within the organization to impact organizational effectiveness. Values cultural diversity and other individual differences in the workforce. Ensures that the organization builds on these differences and that employees are treated in a fair and equitable manner.

Integrity/Honesty - Instills mutual trust and confidence; creates a culture that fosters high standards of ethics; behaves in a fair and ethical manner toward others, and demonstrates a sense of corporate responsibility and commitment to public service.

Resilience - Deals effectively with pressure; maintains focus and intensity and remains optimistic and persistent, even under adversity. Recovers quickly from setbacks. Effectively balances personal life and work.

Team Building - Inspires, motivates, and guides others toward goal accomplishments. Consistently develops and sustains cooperative working relationships. Encourages and facilitates cooperation within the organization and with customer groups; fosters commitment, team spirit, pride, trust. Develops leadership in others through coaching, mentoring, rewarding, and guiding employees.

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LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY DEFINITIONS

ECQ 3 - RESULTS DRIVEN

Accountability - Assures that effective controls are developed and maintained to ensure the integrity of the organization. Holds self and others accountable for rules and responsibilities. Can be relied upon to ensure that projects within areas of specific responsibility are completed in a timely manner and within budget. Monitors and evaluates plans; focuses on results and measuring attainment of outcomes.

Customer Service - Balancing interests of a variety of clients; readily readjusts priorities to respond to pressing and changing client demands. Anticipates and meets the need of clients; achieves quality end products; is committed to continuous improvement of services.

Decisiveness - Exercises good judgment by making sound and well informed decisions; perceives the impact and implications of decisions; makes effective and timely decisions, even when data is limited or solutions produce unpleasant consequences; is proactive and achievement oriented.

Entrepreneurship - Identifies opportunities to develop and market new products and services within or outside of the organization. Is willing to take risks; initiates actions that involve a deliberate risk to achieve a recognized benefit or advantage.

Problem Solving – Identifies and analyzes problems; distinguishes between relevant and irrelevant information to make logical decisions; provides solutions to individual and organizational problems.

Technical Credibility - Understands and appropriately applies procedures, requirements, regulations, and policies related to specialized expertise. Is able to make sound hiring and capital resource decisions and to address training and development needs. Understands linkages between administrative competencies and mission needs.

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LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY DEFINITIONS

ECQ 4 - BUSINESS ACUMEN

Financial Management - Demonstrates broad understanding of principles of financial management and marketing expertise necessary to ensure appropriate funding levels. Prepares, justifies, and/or administers the budget for the program area; uses cost-benefit thinking to set priorities; monitors expenditures in support of programs and policies. Identifies cost-effective approaches. Manages procurement and contracting.

Human Resources Management - Assesses current and future staffing needs based on organizational goals and budget realities. Using merit principles, ensures staff are appropriately selected, developed, utilized, appraised, and rewarded; takes corrective action.

Technology Management - Uses efficient and cost-effective approaches to integrate technology into the workplace and improve program effectiveness. Develops strategies using new technology to enhance decision-making. Understands the impact of technological changes on the organization.

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LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY DEFINITIONS

ECQ 5 - BUILDING COALITIONS/COMMUNICATION

Influencing/Negotiating - Persuades others; builds consensus through give and take; gains cooperation from others to obtain information and accomplish goals; facilitates "win-win" situations.

Interpersonal Skills - Considers and responds appropriately to the needs, feelings, and capabilities of different people in different situations; is tactful, compassionate and sensitive, and treats others with respect.

Oral Communication - Makes clear and convincing oral presentations to individuals or groups; listens effectively and clarifies information as needed; facilitates an open exchange of ideas and fosters an atmosphere of open communication.

Partnering - Develops networks and builds alliances, engages in cross-functional activities; collaborates across boundaries, and finds common ground with a widening range of stakeholders. Utilizes contacts to build and strengthen internal support bases.

Political Savvy - Identifies the internal and external politics that impact the work of the organization. Approaches each problem situation with a clear perception of organizational and political reality; recognizes the impact of alternative courses of action.

Written Communication - Expresses facts and ideas in writing in a clear, convincing and organized manner.

Source: <http://www.opm.gov/ses/html/ecq4.htm>